

Message Text

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TAGS: UK, PINT
SUBJECT: SOME REACTIONS TO THE LATEST ON DEVOLUTION

SUMMARY:
LABOR STILL HAS AN UPHILL FIGHT TO REGAIN CONFIDENCE OF PRO-DEVOLUTION SCOTS WHO WERE BADLY DISAPPOINTED BY FAILURE GUILLOTINE IN FEBRUARY. IN A BBC SCOTLAND SPECIAL ON THE LATEST DEVOLUTION INITIATIVE AN ANTI-DEVOLUTION TORY AND LABOR BACKBENCHER STATED THEIR OPPOSITION IN STRONG AND EVEN INSULTING TERMS. DEVOLUTION MINISTER JOHN SMITH EXPRESSED DISPLEASURE WITH BBC SCOTLAND FOR PICKING UP ONLY ON ANTI-DEVOLUTION NORTH EAST LABOR MP AND CRITICISED SNP'S FRIVOLOUS ATTITUDE TO THE PRESENTATION OF BILL. LIBERAL LEADER STEEL PREDICTABLY SUPPORTED BILL WHILE TORY SHADOW SCOTTISH SECRETARY TAYLOR OPPOSED IT. SNP LEADER STEWART QUESTIONED LABOR'S COMMITMENT AND SEEMED TO PLAN A WAITING GAME. MANY ALSO CAVIL AT COSMETIC NATURE OF SOME OF THE CHANGES AND SUSPECT A POLITICAL MOTIVE FOR INTRODUCTION AT THIS TIME. HOWEVER, BILL IS VIEWED AS AN IMPROVED MODEL AND ITS CHANCES FOR PASSAGE ARE UNIFORMLY ASSESSED IN A FAVORABLE LIGHT BY THE SCOTTISH PRESS.

1. ON JULY 26TH A SPECIAL EDITION OF BBC SCOTLAND'S PUBLIC AFFAIRS PROGRAM "PUBLIC ACCOUNT" DEALT WITH REACTIONS TO
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THE GOVTS. LATEST DEVOLUTION PROPOSALS. PROGRAM BEGAN WITH ANTI-DEVOLUTION ENGLISH TORY MP GEORGE GARDINER AND NORTH EAST LABOR MP BERNARD CONLAN RESTATING THEIR OPPOSITION TO THESE PROPOSALS. CONLAN STATED THAT SCOTLAND WAS A REGION AND NOT A COUNTRY, AND SHOULD BE EQUATED WITH ENGLISH REGIONS LIKE MERSEYSIDE, ETC. THIS TYPE OF COMMENTARY INFURIATES ALMOST ALL SHADES OF SCOTTISH OPINION (AS IF MERSEYSIDE HAD

1000 YEARS OF INDEPENDENT NATIONAL EXISTENCE, A DISTINCTIVE CULTURE (THE BEATLES NOTWITHSTANDING), SEPARATE EDUCATION SYSTEMS, LEGAL SYSTEMS, AND AN ESTABLISHED CHURCH, ETC). CONLAN SHOWED LITTLE UNDERSTANDING OF SCOTS DESIRE FOR DEVOLUTION AND PULL OF THE SNP. IF HIS VIEWS ARE AT ALL TYPICAL OF NORTH EAST LABOR BACKBENCHERS, THE NEW DEVOLUTION BILL HAS A LONG WAY TO GO IN SPITE OF THE OPTIMISTIC VIEW FOUND IN MUCH OF THE PRESS.

2. DEVOLUTION MINISTER JOHN SMITH THEN APPEARED AND DEPLORED BBC SCOTLAND'S POLICY OF ONLY TAKING REACTIONS OF AN ANTI-DEVOLUTION LABOR MP FROM THE NORTH EAST. SMITH ALSO COMMENTED DISPARAGINGLY ON FRIVOLITY IN THE SNP RANKS DURING PRESENTATION OF THE PACKAGE AND MADE POINT THAT THIS LABOR GOVERNMENT WAS FIRST ONE TO PUT DEVOLUTION BEFORE THE COUNTRY AS A MAJOR POLITICAL ISSUE.

3. A DINNER-JACKETED DAVID STEEL GAVE HIS SUPPORT TO THE BILL, PRAISING ITS REMOVAL OF THE GOVERNOR GENERAL OR "NANNY" POWERS OF THE SCOTTISH SECRETARY. TORY SHADOW SCOTTISH SECRETARY EDWARD TAYLOR FELT THERE WAS NO FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE BETWEEN THIS BILL AND THE PREVIOUS ONE AND DECLARED THAT HIS OBJECTIONS TO THE LATTER WERE NOT YET RESOLVED. PARTICULARLY THOSE RELATING TO THE ROLES OF SCOTTISH MP'S AT WESTMINSTER. HE DID NOTE THAT SEPARATION OF SCOTTISH BILL FROM WELSH BILL IMPROVED FORMER'S CHANCE OF PASSAGE AND COULD SEE IT GOING UNCLASSIFIED

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INTO A REFERENDUM, BUT HE WARNED THAT THE SCOTTISH VOTER COULD NOT BE TAKEN FOR GRANTED AND HE MIGHT REJECT A DEVOLUTION THAT MEANT MORE TAXES AND CIVIL SERVANTS. QUESTIONING LABOR'S COMMITMENT, SNP LEADER DONALD STEWART AVOIDED EXPRESSING SUPPORT FOR THE BILL AND SEEMED TO BE PLAYING A WAITING GAME.

4. MUCH OF THE ATTITUDE IN SCOTLAND IS THAT THIS BILL APPEARED BECAUSE OF GOVTS. NEED TO MAINTAIN LIB-LAB PACT AND ARREST A FURTHER SLIDE IN LABOR'S POSITION IN SCOTLAND. THEY WELL REALIZE THAT IT WILL NOT COME TO A VOTE UNTIL WELL INTO THE NEXT SESSION AND MUCH CAN HAPPEN BETWEEN NOW AND THEN. WHILE MANY ARE PLEASED WITH VARIOUS CHANGES REDUCING THE POWER OF THE SCOTTISH SECRETARY, ESTABLISHMENT JOINT COMMISSIONS, AND A MORE ORDERLY FORMULA FOR FINANCE, THEY ARE ALSO AWARE THAT THE PROPOSED ASSEMBLY STILL HAS NO REVENUE RAISING POWERS. PRO-DEVOLUTION SCOTS WERE MUCH DISAPPOINTED BY FAILURE OF GUILLOTINE LAST WINTER AND LABOR GOVT. HAS AN UPHILL FIGHT TO REGAIN THEIR CONFIDENCE.

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